

social pyramid a pyramid outline showing the positions of social classes according to their status in a society

social class a group in a society that is ranked by factors such as wealth, property, and rights

status importance

noble of high birth or rank

peasant a person who does farmwork for wealthy land-owners

9.2 Ancient Egypt's Social Pyramid

Egyptian society was structured like a pyramid. At the very top of this **social pyramid** was the pharaoh, Egypt's **supreme** ruler. Egyptian religion strengthened the pharaoh's authority. Pharaohs were believed to be gods, and their word was law.

Next in importance were several layers of **social classes**. The classes near the top of the pyramid had fewer people and enjoyed higher **status**. The classes nearer the bottom had greater numbers of people but lower status.

Egypt's Social Classes Below the pharaoh were the next two highest classes in the social pyramid—government officials and priests. They were the most powerful groups in Egypt.

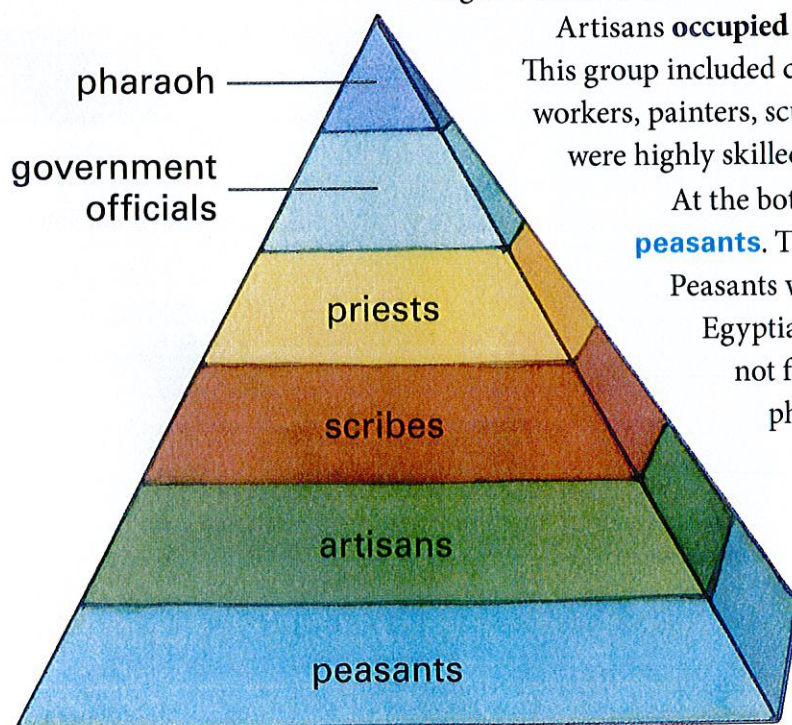
Government officials carried out the orders of the pharaoh. Most officials came from **noble** families. They were powerful and wealthy, and they enjoyed a high quality of life.

Priests were also a powerful group, because religion touched every part of people's daily lives. Priests were in charge of the temples and religious rituals. They also oversaw the important ceremonies surrounding death and burial.

Next on the social pyramid were scribes. Scribes held a respected position in society. They recorded information for government and religious leaders. It took many years of schooling to become a scribe.

Artisans **occupied** the next layer of the social pyramid. This group included craftspeople like carpenters, metalworkers, painters, sculptors, and stone carvers. Artisans were highly skilled, but they had little social status.

At the bottom of the social pyramid were the **peasants**. They were the largest social class. Peasants worked the land, providing the Egyptians with a steady food supply. When not farming, peasants worked on the pharaoh's massive building projects.



Ancient Egyptian society was organized like a pyramid. The groups near the top had the most power and status.



Egyptian women enjoyed more freedom and rights than most women in the ancient world. A few women even became pharaohs.

Life in Egypt's Social Classes Egypt's social pyramid was fairly **rigid**. Most people belonged to the same social class as their parents. There was little chance of moving to a higher class. Members of different classes may have had some things in common, but, in general, their lives were quite different.

Egyptians in all social classes cherished family life. Most Egyptians married within their social group. Children were highly valued.

Men and women had different **roles** within the family. Men were the heads of their households. They worked to support the family. Fathers often began to train their sons at a young age to take on their line of work. Women typically managed the home and raised the children. Upper-class women had servants or slaves to help them. Lower-class women did the work themselves.

Men were in charge of Egyptian society, but women enjoyed more freedom and rights than most women in the ancient world. They could own land and run businesses. They could also ask for divorces and represent themselves in legal matters. Some women in the middle and upper classes worked as doctors, government officials, or priestesses. Both women and men enjoyed a better quality of life the higher they were on the social pyramid.

The Egyptians believed that their class system created a stable, well-ordered society. Each group had its own role to play. Let's take a look at the duties and daily lives of the various social classes during the time of the New Kingdom.